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Japanese Martial Arts & Culture

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Common Vocabulary

The following list of basic words and phrases may prove helpful to the beginner. Note that in the *romaji* spelling system used here, “a” is pronounced as in “father,” “e” as in “bet,” “i” as in “eat,” “o” as in “tone,” and “u” as in “chute.”

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General Terms

aiki (spiritual harmony) The state of having a strong fighting spirit while being in sync with the opponent's *Ki*.

Aiki-jo (Way of Spiritual Harmony) Japanese martial art founded in 1927 by Morihei Ueshiba which emphasizes self-realization through the study of non-destructive self-defense movement.

aikido-ka (Aikido practitioner)

Aiki-jo (harmonious spirit staff) Non-violent principles and strategy of Aikido applied to short staff.

Aiki-ken (harmonious spirit sword) Non-violent principles and strategy of Aikido applied to sword.

All Japan Kendo Federation laido (Zen Nihon Kendo Renmei laido) Formerly *Seitei Gata*. Basic forms of laido promoted by the organization to foster understanding and appreciation of Japanese swordsmanship, specifically Kendo, though now evolved into a self-sustaining art in its own right. ZNKR laido is the most widely practiced style of Japanese swordsmanship practiced in the world today.

arigato gozaimasu (thank you) Formal, but not too polite.

atemi (strike) A defensive blow or the threat thereof used to “cut” the attacker's *Ki*, to dissolve his or her mind-body coordination.

ayumi-ashi Normal walking, one foot passing the other.

Budo (martial arts) Martial arts training with a strong spiritual component in addition to technique.

dan (rank) Any of the ten blackbelt ranks: the first is shodan, then nidan, sandan, yondan, godan, etc.

dojo (training hall) Sometimes applied to the community of Aikido practitioners.

dozo (please)

enbu (public demonstration)

freestyle (also randori) Continuous defense against one or multiple attackers.

fudoshin (immovable mind) A state of mind that is not disturbed or distracted, yet remains flexible.

gi (also dogi, uniform, or keikogi, practice uniform) Training uniform worn when practicing.

Gojo (five virtues) Confucian virtues practiced by *Budo* practitioners: *Jin*: compassion; *Gi*: righteousness; *Rei*: propriety; *Chi*: wisdom; *Shin*: faithfulness.

hai (yes; O.K.)

hakama A long split-skirt/pant worn over the gi by students with dan rank.

hanmi (half triangle) One of two basic stances in Aikido: the feet are placed one in front of the other.

hanmi handachi (half triangle, half sword (taking)) Techniques practiced with nage seated or kneeling, and uke standing.

hidari (left)

hiraki-ashi (side step) Any footwork that shifts position to the side coupled with a reorientation towards the attacker's center from the new position.

laido (Way of Sword Drawing) Non-combative martial disciplines of classical and modern Japanese swordsmanship in which the object is to draw and cut in the same motion.

irimi (entering) A direct advance into an attacker's space; identifies a linear version of a technique.

juban (light, white undergarment specific to formal kimono wear)

jushin (soft mind) A mental state of relaxed attentiveness, without egoistic attachment to preconceptions.

Kaicho (president) Administrative head of an organization.

kata (form) A predetermined sequence of techniques used both as an encyclopedic collection and as a device for teaching Ki flow, concentration and rhythm. kata are practiced with staff and sword; see Weapons Practice: bokken, jo.

katachi (correct form) To make the ideal shape of “picture” of a technique during performance.

kamae (posture) Correct form of body and mind.

keiko, geiko (training in the Way)

keiko-gi (training uniform)

Ki (energy, spirit) 1. Term used to describe the strong, energetic state resulting from the correct coordination of mind and body; 2. The basic energy which exists in all matter that is born, lives, and dies. In humans, the source of kinetic energy responsible for perception, sensation, and instinct; 3. A term in Buddhism referring to the instant in which our senses interact with the outside world; 4. The instant when opposing forces react to cause change; 5. Martial arts: an opportunity to strike.

Ki-ai (union of spirit) 1. A focused expression of mind-body coordination, usually a shout; an atemi. 2. A state where one is fully focused on the opponent’s movements and your own strategy.

Kiatsu; Kiatsu Ryoho (spirit pressing) A therapeutic technique to stimulate circulation, or Ki, developed by Koichi Tohei and practiced as a form of misogi to treat illness and injury.

Ki Development Exercises Movements culled from self-defense techniques that are practiced at the beginning of each Aikido class in order to develop Ki feeling, or mind-body coordination.

Ki Breathing, Ki Meditation, Ki Chanting, Kiatsu Ryoho see *Misogi*.

kihon Exercises used to practice basic movement.

kimono (kimono) Formal traditional clothing; styles differ for men and women, but martial arts performances are given only in men’s wear. See *montsuki*.

ko-budo (old martial ways) In contrast to modern martial arts, arts that have preserved their methods and techniques through the centuries.

Kokyu; kokyu (timing; breath control) 1. One of the principles of correct movement in Aikido: as everything in nature moves in rhythm, so attacks are led through correct timing and rhythm. See Techniques: kokyunage. 2. To disguise one’s breathing so an opponent can’t discern when to attack.

ko-ryu (old style)

koshi-ita (hip board) A flat vertical back panel at the waist of a hakama.

kyu (grade) Any of the ranks below black belt. Adult kyu ranks begin at sixth and finish at first kyu.

ma (timing) A n important concept distinctive in the martial arts that refers to the temporal interval between objects, events, or actions.

ma ai (correct distance) Distance between the nage and the uke; “the space between;” appropriate distance the attacker needs to reach the target; the distance nage must maintain for safety.

metsuke (eye pressure) Exhibiting the logic of a movement or technique by maintaining visual contact with a target while moving.

migi (right)

mittsu-no-sen (three strategies for seizing initiative) Of paramount importance in all the martial arts is the ability to suppress an attack the moment it begins. This concept bears study but is too complex to detail here: see Bannister Sensei.

misogi (water purification) Exercises to stimulate mind-body coordination; especially Ki Breathing, Ki Meditation, Ki Chanting, as well as some forms of technique and weapons practice.

mokuso (meditation) The act of composing breath, posture and mind while sitting in *seiza* at the beginning and end of *keiko*.

mushin (no mind) A state in which the practitioner is free from all attachments to perception and can act intuitively with complete freedom.

Muso Shinden Ryu (The Art of Drawing and Cutting from Divine Transmission through a Dream) One of the world’s most popular old style (*koryu*) sword schools, founded in the Kanto District by Hayashizaki Jinsuke Minamoto no Shigenobu (1549-1621), and brought to its present form by the last *soke* Nakayama Hakudo (1869 - 1958), founder of modern *laido*.

mon (crest) Family or organization heraldic crest.

montsuki (montsuki) Formal, traditional men’s clothing featuring a formal crest. See *mon*.

nage (throw) One who throws.

Nuki Uchi (sudden attack) Twelfth technique of All Japan Kendo Federation Iai. See *laido*.

nuki-waza (sudden avoidance) A martial arts technique combining strategic repositioning to avoid an attack and an immediate counterattack.

O-Fudo-sama (Fudo Myo-o) Guardian deity of the Tsubomi Seishin Kan Dojo. A king of magical knowledge who stands in triumph at the center of the Buddhist universe, representing victory over unhelpful passions and desires.

obi (belt)

okuri-ashi (following step) Footwork in which the front leg moves first to set the ma-ai, and the back leg moves after, coordinated with the hips, to apply the center of the body to a movement.

one-gaishi-masu (student: "please teach;" instructor: "please receive") Formal invitation to practice.

rei (bow) Formal bow, traditionally offered as a gesture of respect.

Reiho; Hajime no Reiho; Owari no Reiho (bowing etiquette) 1. Formal bowing etiquette to show respect to the *shomen*, one's partner, and/or a weapon; 2. Beginning bowing etiquette; 3. Ending bowing etiquette.

Ri-ai The logic or reasonableness of a movement.

ryu-ha (style) An independently organized group or school in a martial art formed in response to differences of thinking and/or forms of training.

Seitei Gata (basic techniques) Former name of the *All Japan Kendo Federation Iaido* techniques.

seiza (correct or calm sitting) Traditional kneeling posture used when sitting.

semeru (seize initiative) Closing the distance to take initiative and unsettle the opponent.

Sensei (Born before) Traditional instructor's title, 3rd-Dan or higher.

shikko (knee walking)

shi-kai (four unfavorables) Four mental conditions to be avoided: astonishment, fear, doubt, and hesitation.

shinsa (test)

shinza (honored seat) Dojo shrine.

shiza (natural stance) A stance in which the feet are placed side by side, one foot's width apart, with the weight balanced on the balls of the feet.

Shomen (front of the head) Front of the dojo.

shugyo (arduous training) The process or rigorously training the body and polishing the mind.

shu-ha-ri (three training levels) A term describing the stages every successful student passes through: *shu* - mastery of basics, *ha* - adding one's own ideas and flavor, and finally *ri* - rising above what has been learned to establish a new, personal style.

su-dori (without holding) Aikido: a type of technique in which no physical contact is made, yet the opponent loses posture and balance.

su-ki (without spirit) A weakness of mind caused by astonishment, fear, doubt, or hesitation. Also a weakness in one's posture or technique when losing control of the center: your own, your opponent's, and the line between.

suri-ashi (brushing footwork) The typical foot movement of Japanese martial arts that keeps the soles in nearly constant contact with the floor to enhance balance and stability.

suwari waza (without standing technique) Both nage and uke are seated or kneeling.

tabi (socks) Split-toed socks for wear with zori; Aikido - blue or black may be worn for general foot protection or for formality; Iaido - white tabi are worn only with formal *kimono*.

tachi waza (standing technique)

tadashi (correct posture) Ideal body alignment and mental state to achieve one's full potential.

Tsubomi Seishin Kan (Place of the Budding Flowers) Derived from characters in Kendo champion Nakakura Kyoshi's name, given to our dojo with his son's permission by Yoshimoto Trent Sensei of the Tsubomi Seishin Kan Iaido Kai, Tokyo, Japan.

tenkan (divert, turn aside) A circular lead of an attack; identifies a turning version of a technique.

tokonoma (alcove) Formal raised alcove where art is displayed.

tori (take or grasp) See **Attacks** and **Weapons Practice**.

uke (attacker) One who attacks and falls.

Uke Nagashi (receive and parry) Third technique of All Japan Kendo Federation Iai. See *Iaido*.

ukemi (receiving arts) The arts of attacking and falling.

Undo (movement) Usually used in reference to the Ki Exercises.

Ushiro (behind) Second technique of All Japan Kendo Federation Iai. See *Iaido*.

ushiro (behind) Usually used in reference to attacks from the rear.

Waza; waza (technique) 1. A complete technique presentation; see *Iaido*; 2. any individual technique.

zanshin (unbroken mind; concentration) Continuous awareness; the "follow through" of a technique; in Aikido, for example, nage is connected to uke even after the throw in an unbroken flow of Ki, simultaneously ready to receive new attacks from any direction.

zori (shoes) Slippers used indoors.

Parts of the Body

ashi (leg, foot)

hara (center, lower abdomen)

hiji (elbow)

kata (shoulder)

koshi (hips)

kote (forearm)

kubi (throat)

kuchi (mouth)

me (eye, eyes)

men (head or face)

mune (chest) Lower abdomen, corresponding to One Point or stomach; a target area for tsuki.

Seika no itten (navel below) Located at the level of the pelvic bone, the center of mental and physical balance.

shomen (front of head) Forehead

suigetsu (solar plexus)

tanden (center) Point fixed at the lower abdomen.

te (hand) Katate, single hand; ryote, both hands.

tekubi (wrist)

ude (arm)

Ki Development Exercises

Note that there are 33 Ki Exercises; only movements known specifically by their Japanese names are listed here.

Funekogi Undo (Rowing exercise)

Happo Undo (eight direction exercise) Shomenuchi undo in eight directions.

Koho Tendo Undo (rolling forwards and backwards) Roll back, then come forwards to stop in dependable posture, cross-legged, hands on on the floor.

Kokyu Dosa (timing practice) Ki and One Point seated exercise with partner.

Kote Gaeshi Undo (forearm turn-out exercise) A wrist exercise.

Nikkyo Undo (second principle) A wrist exercise.

Sankyo Undo (third principle) A wrist exercise.

Sayu Undo (left/right exercise) Arm extension to the side.

Sayu Choyaku Undo (left/right leap exercise) Arm extension with leap.

Shomenuchi Undo (front head hit exercise) Derived from defense against the most basic sword attack, raising and lowering arms.

Tekubifuri Undo (wrist shake exercise) Shake hands rhythmically.

Tekubikosa Undo (wrist cross exercise) An exercise in which the forearms are extended towards the center as if looking at a watch on each forearm.

Tenkan Undo (turn exercise) Lead and turn.

Udefuri Undo (arm swing exercise) Horizontal arm extension.

Udefuri Choyaku Undo (arm swing leap exercise) Horizontal arm swing with leap.

Udemawashi Undo (arm circle exercise) Vertical arm swings, singly and in unison, forward and backwards.

Ushiro Undo (behind exercise) Extend arms and twist sideways.

Ushiro Tekubitori Undo (behind wrist grasp forward exercise) Arms extend, step forward, drop.

Zengo Undo (two direction exercise) Shomenuchi Undo in two directions.

Zenshin Koshin Undo (forward and backwards movement) Step to and back away from pointing finger.

Attacks

gyakku kesa giri (reverse diagonal cut) Sword: cut from hip to opposite shoulder.

katatori (shoulder take)

katatori menuchi (shoulder take, head strike) Hold stabilize or turn nage combined with shomen-uchi.

katatetori (shoulder hand take) Hold nage's wrist with one hand.

keri, geri (kick)

kesa giri (diagonal cut) Sword: a diagonal cut from shoulder to opposite hip.

kiri-otoshi; kiri-oroshi (overhead cut) Sword: full overhead cut down to the hara.

mae kerī (front kick) Straight kick to any target from shin to chin, but usually directed to knees or groin.
mawashi kerī (circle kick) Roundhouse kick targeting the ribs to any target from knees to head.
ma-yoko giri (timing side cut) Sword: horizontal cut across the lower abdomen.
morote tsuki (two-handed thrust) Sword: a two-handed thrust to the *suigetsu*.
mune tsuki (chest thrust) Straight punch to the nage's solar plexus.
men tsuki (head thrust) Straight punch to the face.
nukitsuke (sudden attack) Sword: draw and strike in the same motion.
ryokatatori (both shoulder take) Hold both shoulders from the front.
ryote mochi (two hand take) Uke uses both hands to hold and twist one of nage's forearms.
ryotetori (both hand take) Both hands hold both wrists.
shomenuchi (front head strike) Overhead vertical strike with weapon or edge of hand.
tsuki (thrust)
ushiro hijitori (behind elbow take) Hold both elbows from behind.
ushiro katatori (behind shoulder take) Grab both shoulders from behind.
ushiro kubishime (behind neck choke) Hold wrist and choke from behind.
ushiro tekubitori (behind wrist hold) Hold both wrists from behind.
ushiro tori (behind take) Bear hug nage's whole body from behind.
ushiro tsuki (behind thrust) Straight thrust from behind. Generally associated with tanto-tori practice.
ushiro udetori (behind arm take) Bear hug elbows from behind.
yoko kerī (side kick) Sideways thrust kick, usually targeting from knees to chest.
yokomenuchi (side of head strike) Diagonal strike to temple.
yokomenuchi hantai (side of head strike opposite) Backhand version of yokomen-uchi.

Aikido Techniques (by nage)

gokkyo (fifth principle) A handhold that renders nage's hand and arm less vulnerable to attack, specifically used against a yokomenuchi tantotori attack; see Weapons Practice.
ikkyo (first principle) Throw by reversing direction of uke's whole arm.
irimi-nage (entering throw) A category of kokyunage that involves a direct entrance into uke's space.
juji-nage (crossed arm throw) A throw executed when uke's arms are crossed at right angles.
kaiten-nage (rotary throw) Nage "rolls" uke forward like a wheel by leveraging uke's arm across his back.
kokyu-nage (timing throw) Any of a broad category of techniques that involve leading the rhythm of uke's motion into instability resulting in a throw or drop.
koshi-nage (hip throw) A throw over nage's hip usually resulting in a break fall.
kote-gaeshi (wrist turn-out) Taking posture and balance by leading the attacker's wrist in an outward and downward direction.
nikkyo (second principle) A specific joint lock, that stretches uke's arm in a "Z" position.
sankyo (third principle) A joint lock that twists uke's arm in a vertical spiral to take out slack.
shiho-nage (four direction throw) Nage steps beneath uke's arm and turns it back behind.
su-dori (without holding) A throw executed by suddenly dropping below an onrushing attack.
ten-chi-nage (heaven earth throw) High and low leads result in a backwards fall.
ude-kime-nage (arm extend throw) Extend and roll arm under uke's shoulder.
yon-kyo (fourth principle) A throw via a pressure point on uke's forearm.

Weapons Practice

Aiki-jo (harmonious spirit staff) Non-violent principles and strategy of Aikido applied to short staff.
Aiki-ken (harmonious spirit sword) Non-violent principles and strategy of Aikido applied to sword.
All Japan Kendo Federation Iaido (Zen Nihon Kendo Renmei Iaido) Formerly *Seitei Gata*. Basic forms of Iaido promoted by the organization to foster understanding and appreciation of Japanese swordsmanship, specifically Kendo, though now evolved into a self-sustaining art in its own right. ZNKR Iaido is the most widely practiced style of Japanese swordsmanship practiced in the world today.
bohi (sword blade groove)
bokken, bokuto (wood sword) A practice weapon with about the same weight and shape as a katana.
tachi waza (standing technique)
boshi (sharp section of sword blade at the tip)
chiburi (blood cleaning movement) Sword: any flicking movement designed to shake gore from the blade. Yoko-chiburi: horizontal side motion; Kesa-chiburi: large diagonal motion.

chudan-no-kamae (middle posture) Weapons: a standing neutral defensive posture with weapon extended from hara to opponent's left eye.

gaeshi-waza (turning out technique) To hit or press in one direction, then suddenly change to attack the opposite side.

Ganmen Ate (center face hit) Eighth technique of All Japan Kendo Federation Iai. See *Iaido*.

gedan-no-kamae (lower position) Weapon: presenting the weapon in a low position to invite response.

gyakku kesa giri (reverse diagonal) Rising cut from hip to opposite shoulder.

habaki (sword collar) Collar that joins the tsuba and tsuka to the blade of a sword.

hakama-sabaki (hakama pushing) The act of smoothing the hakama away from the feet before sitting.

Happo Giri (eight directions cut) First kata of Tsubomi Aikido and Aiki-ken.

hasso-no-kamae (carry position) Weapon: holding the weapon upright and to the side to facilitate carrying, vision, and flexibility of response.

ha (edge) The sharp edge of a weapon blade.

ha-suji (blade angle)

jo (short staff) A wooden staff, standard length 54" and 15/16" in diameter.

jodan-no-kamae (high position) A dominant defensive standing posture that facilitates rapid counterattack. The weapon is held high overhead, about 30 degrees behind vertical, with the hands one fist above the forehead.

jo-tori (short staff taking) Throwing an attacker who either attacks with the short staff or who attempts to take it from nage.

kashira (end cap of a sword hilt)

katana (long sword) Refers to forge-folded and differentially tempered steel blades, worn thrust through the *obi* edge up, of length longer than 60cm.

Kesa Giri (diagonal cut) Fifth technique of All Japan Kendo Federation Iai. Sword cut from the junction of neck and shoulder to opposite hip. See *Iaido*.

Ki-Ken-Tai-Ichi (spirit-sword-body are one) An essential component of both offensive and defensive sword movement: when all these elements are coordinated the conditions exist for a valid strike.

Kihon, kihon Exercises used to practice basic movement.

kiri-gaeshi (cut and turn) *Aiki-ken* and *Iaido*: comprehensive partner exercise used to practice basic sword movements involving a series of rapid attacking and defending movements, followed by a counterstrike and direction change.

kiri-otoshi, kiri-oroshi (large overhead cut) Weapons: a vertical cut made from the top of the head to hip level.

kissaki (sword tip)

ko-dachi (wooden short sword) A practice weapon of approximately the same weight and length of a wakizashi.

koi-guchi (carp mouth) Open end of a saya.

kojiri (butt end on a saya)

ko-te (forearm) To cut or strike the forearm of one's partner during sword or staff practice.

kurigata (sword retaining cord knob on the sword sheath)

Mae (forward) First technique of All Japan Kendo Federation Iai. See *Iaido*.

ma-yoko-giri (timing-side-cut) Horizontal cut across lower abdomen.

mogito (fake sword) Sword with an unsharpened, non-ferrous blade.

monouchi (striking area) Optimum area on a bladed weapon where the force of the strike is maximized.

Morote Tsuki (two-handed thrust) Sixth technique of All Japan Kendo Federation Iai. See *Iaido*.

mune (blade back) The back of the sword blade, opposite the *ha*.

Muso Shinden Ryu (The Art of Drawing and Cutting from Divine Transmission through a Dream) One of the world's most popular old style (*koryu*) sword schools, founded in the Kanto District by Hayashizaki Jinsuke Minamoto no Shigenobu (1549-1621), and brought to its present form by the last *soke* Nakayama Hakudo (1869 - 1958), founder of modern *Iaido*.

nihon-to (Japanese sword) General term for a type of sword manufactured in the typical Japanese manner, with forge-folding and differential tempering. Includes *tachi*, *katana*, *waki-zashi*, and *tanto*.

no-to (resheathing) The act of returning the sword blade to its sheath.

Reiho; Hajime no Reiho; Owari no Reiho (bowing etiquette) 1. Formal bowing etiquette to show respect to the *shomen*, one's partner, and/or a weapon; 2. Beginning bowing etiquette; 3. Ending bowing etiquette.

sageo (sword retaining cord)

Sanpo Giri (three direction cut) Seventh technique of All Japan Kendo Federation Iai. See *Iaido*.

san-sappo (three ways to overwhelm an opponent) “Kill the *Ki*,” “kill the tool,” kill the *waza*.”

saya (sword sheath)

saya-biki (sheath pulling) The act of drawing the sword by removing the sheath, rather than by movement of the sword alone.

Seitei Gata (basic techniques) Former name of the *All Japan Kendo Federation Iaido* techniques.

Shiho Giri (four directions cut) Tenth technique of All Japan Kendo Federation Iai. See *Iaido*.

shinai (split bamboo training sword)

shinken (“new” sword) A sword with a forged steel blade.

shinogi (longitudinal ridge) The raised ridge on the side of a Japanese sword used for deflection.

Soete Tsuki (supporting hand thrust) Ninth technique of All Japan Kendo Federation Iai. See *Iaido*.

So Giri (complete cutting) Eleventh technique of All Japan Kendo Federation Iai. See *Iaido*.

suri-ageru (upwards deflection) To parry an opponent’s downward strike by sweeping one’s weapon upwards to make a glancing blow.

suri-komu (side deflection) To block the opponent’s sword by using one’s own shinogi as if twisting it into the opponent’s sword.

suri-nagasu (flowing deflection) To use one’s shinogi in light contact to catch an opponent’s sword from the side.

suri-otosu (downwards deflection) Downwards pressure or a downwards strike, using one’s own shinogi, to deflect or subdue the opponent’s sword.

tachi (long sword) Refers to an older type of sword from the Muramachi period, worn hung at the waist edge down, and much longer than 60cm.

tachi-suji (sword cutting path) Correct sword action, fully extending before making a downwards cut.

tachi-tori (sword taking) Throwing techniques involving taking a wooden sword from an attacker.

taigi (body art) six-movement kata; especially weapons kata.

taikai (tournament) See *Iaido*.

tanto (short sword) A wooden or forged blade of length under 30cm.

tenouchi (proper grip while striking)

tsuba (sword hand guard)

tsuka (sword handle)

Tsuka Ate (hilt thrust) Fourth technique of All Japan Kendo Federation Iai. See *Iaido*.

tanto-tori (knife taking) Disarming and throwing an uke who attacks with a knife.

uchi-ma (optimum distance) Ideal distance to create opportunity to strike the opponent.

waki-no-kamae (back stance) Weapon: defensive posture in which a weapon is held behind to disguise its length.

waki-zashi (short sword) Refers to forge-folded, differentially-tempered, steel blades of length 30-60cm.